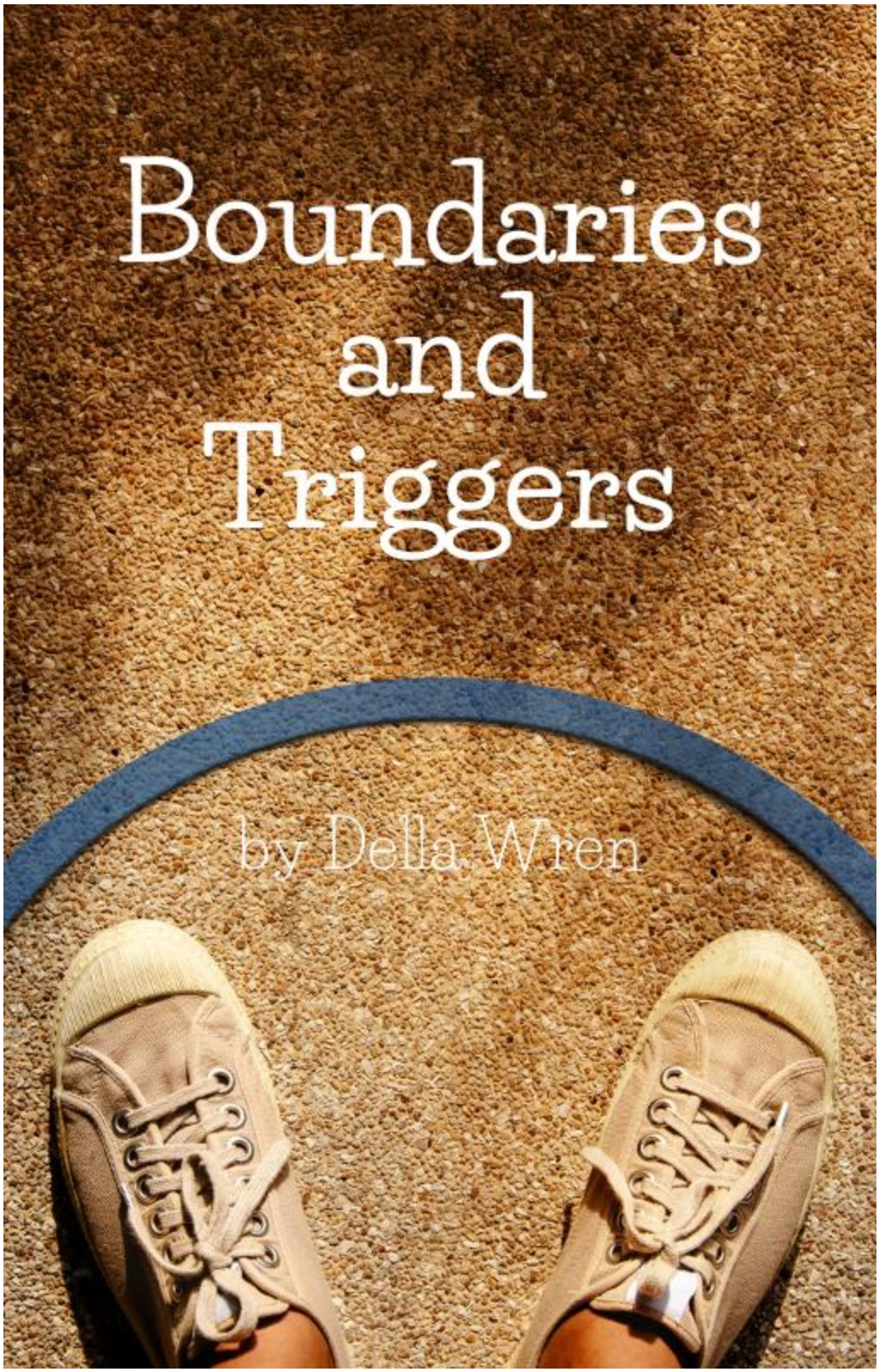
Boundaries
and
Triggers
by Della Wren

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To the triggers that made me heal my own pain.
Thank you.

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Boundaries and Triggers

Introduction

We need to begin this by defining what we're talking about so we're all on the same page. I realize there are psychological definitions of these words, however I'm not a therapist, psychiatrist, or psychologist. Here's what I mean when I use the words "trigger" or "boundary".

A trigger is anything that upsets you no matter how big or small it may be.

A boundary is a wall you put in place to protect yourself. There are healthy boundaries and there are unhealthy boundaries. Can you guess what we're talking about here? Yep! The unhealthy ones. These are the boundaries we put in place to protect our existing pain and trigger points. When something somebody says or does

upsets us we put the boundary in place that says "you can't do that in my space". It's just protecting our own pain instead of actually dealing with the reason why the pain was felt in the first place.

The model of self-mastery that I have learned and live by is based on the idea that if anything at all upsets you it's up to you to heal it within yourself. It doesn't matter what it is, who did it, why they did it, or when they did it. It doesn't matter whether you had control or not. The circumstances don't matter. The timing doesn't matter. The reason doesn't matter. The only thing that matters is that it bothered you and that makes it yours to deal with within yourself.

When you live this way it makes boundaries useless. You no longer need to defend yourself. You no longer need to control your circumstances the same way. You no longer need to be bothered by what's happening around you. You learn to simply accept reality as it is without needing to change it.

That doesn't mean that you can't work towards change. Accepting what is doesn't stop you from creating a new future. It doesn't make change wrong or bad. It doesn't mean that goals are somehow a problem. What it does is simply allows you to be okay in the life you're in with the people you have around you, the circumstances that exist, and the problems that are ever-present.

To be okay where you are and not need to control or change anything, you can't be living a life where you play defense constantly because it makes you argue with everything. It makes you want to control everything. It makes you mad all the

time. What we're trying to do is chill a bit, relax, get okay with other people's stuff when they throw it at you, stop being bothered by the pain that other people bring you.

In a book a wrote a few years ago, I was using the example of a cat bringing its owner a dead bird. The cat is really proud of itself when it presents that dead bird. The cat is showing you its prowess. It's showing you that it appreciates you by rewarding you with this dead bird. As the owner of the cat, you're a little less than pleased with the idea of your kitty bringing home a dead bird. It's not your idea of a great present. So what do you do with that? Do you punish the cat? It doesn't know that you don't like dead birds. Or do you do just deal with it?

When people bring you their pain, however they display it to you - maybe they tell you about it, maybe they pick a fight with you, maybe they insult you, maybe they yell at you, maybe they do something else that you don't like - your job is to treat them the same way you would treat the cat that brought you the dead bird. It's not worth getting upset about. It doesn't have to be a problem. You don't have to get offended. You don't have to defend yourself. You don't have to do anything. You can just let that person spout pain until they stop. You can just be okay within yourself and not feel like you need to engage in the pain at all.

By removing the need to protect yourself from their pain by implementing a protective boundary, it means you don't have to end that relationship. You don't have to evict anybody from your life or your space. You don't have to take control or

manage anything outside of yourself. You free yourself up to be compassionate, caring, kind, considerate, and understanding with the people around you that are struggling. You recognize the pain isn't yours and you leave it where it belongs - with them. You hand them their proverbial snowballs (pain) back.

There's an argument here that you want to have because you want to tell me that you can have boundaries and be compassionate at the same time. This doesn't work. The compassion is fake because it's a defense mechanism. It's not genuine. If it was genuine you wouldn't need the boundary. Genuine compassion requires guards, boundaries, and walls to be dropped. Compassion done behind a boundary is coming from a place of self-protection. That's not compassion. That's self-defense. Those are different things. They might sound the same verbally to somebody listening to you, but the energy behind them is very different. It's the energy behind them that matters because that's the thing that's within you. That's the thing you have control over. That's the thing you can manage. The goal is to manage it in such a way that your compassion is genuine all the time, even when the circumstances surrounding you are far less than ideal.

None of that is easy. You're not going to do it perfectly every time. I've had to learn to stop defending myself. I had to learn that the boundaries and walls I had put in place were causing more harm than good. They were creating dysfunction in my relationships and in my life in general. I lived in a constant state of defensiveness that created a lot of problems for me. I taught myself how to stop doing that. Am I

perfect? Of course not. But I'm able to manage myself well enough that even if I mess it up, I can hold myself accountable and go back and apologize and/or re-have the conversation.

The purpose of life is not to simply be miserable and die. You're not here to suffer or be in pain all the time. As humans, we are taught, learn, and even make up ways of being in the world that create pain for us. We aren't taught how to manage our thinking or fix our perspective when it creates pain. We get taught instead to buy into the stories of the mind, that our perspective is always true, and that life is just meant to be hard. Those ideas keep us stuck. They keep us in pain. Most importantly, they keep our power outside of us. They put our power to be okay in the hands of the people and circumstances we are surrounded by every single day. Not to be dramatic, but this forced sense of powerlessness keeps you from healing. It keeps you stuck because it makes you believe you don't have the power to heal or that things simply are whatever you perceive them to be. Those things aren't true and they cause you pain.

My wish for you is that you begin to understand your power. I want you to understand that you have the power to heal the pain hidden behind the boundaries you create for yourself. You have the power to stop defending yourself, to put your guard down, and to allow your life to just be what it is without all the stories you want to tell about it. I want you to get to the same place I'm at and maybe even be better at this than I am. I want to do that by walking you through a made-up scenario that

allows me to work through some of the arguments, the stories, and the problems we can run into as we try to drop the boundaries we have that are protecting our pain.

It's a work in progress. It doesn't happen overnight. It takes courage and persistence. It's not easy. It's a daily practice that changes how you show up in the world. It's time to stop being bothered by everything. This method that I offer in this little guide is one way to do that. Self-mastery offers you the tools that you need to live a life that is peaceful and unfettered from the daily struggles that most people experience. You can enjoy your life. Life gets to be okay. I'm hoping that this guide can give you a path to start dropping the boundaries and being okay in your own life because you deserve that. We all do.

The Scenario

You've been triggered! Somebody has said or done something that's got your knickers in a knot. What could it be? Who was the last person that annoyed you? What was the last thing that happened that made you put up a boundary or made you stand your ground or defend yourself in some way? Use that scenario as we work through this process. Let's see if we can figure out what the pain was that you were defending within yourself.

The Story

When somebody does something we don't like, say they insult us, we get defensive really quickly. We decide we don't have to tolerate that bullsh!t, we don't have to let people treat us like that, we don't have to put up with their attitude, and so on. Those are all ego defense mechanisms. They are also a boundary. That need to defend yourself is a boundary you've created. People aren't allowed to treat me like that.

There is already a story being told here and it's that the person calling you names is treating you badly. The person calling you names is just projecting their pain. They aren't treating you good or bad. They aren't doing anything to you at all actually. They are simply showing you pain. Your perception that they are treating you badly is what makes you defend yourself.

You took it personally. You picked up the pain or the insult they threw at you and you put it on. It became a costume that you started to wear. Because you took it

and you wore it, now you have to defend it. Now it becomes part of you. I am this thing this person said about me. This makes you engage in the argument and throw pain back. If the person doesn't stop throwing their pain around quickly enough for you, you evict them temporarily and sometimes permanently. You want nothing to do with that and so to maintain your sense of peace you try to control the outside world by removing this person from your space instead of managing your internal world which is where your sense of peace is actually found.

You put it outside of you. You made the other person responsible for how you feel. Your need for control made you do that. Your perception that the person was doing something to you made you do that. The person is simply projecting their pain. How you take that is up to you, not the other person.

In spiritual circles we often say that we can't be responsible for how other people feel about what we're doing or saying. Well guess what? It works the other way too. You can't make other people responsible for how you feel, but you try to. You call it a boundary.

What actually happened? The other person called you names and you were triggered by that. It hurt your feelings. It bothered you. Maybe it unconsciously brought up old painful memories of other people that called you names. The trigger results in pain and a pain response. The pain response is your defense of yourself based on whatever the unconscious story is you're telling about what the other person is doing.

The story is that the other person is doing something to you. What are they doing? Saying words. We're taught about the power of those words. We're taught that words have meaning and purpose. Words are energy. Words matter. Yes, they do matter, they do have energy, if they didn't I wouldn't be writing this because it wouldn't have any effect. It wouldn't matter. Here's the rub though - what you do with those words is up to you not the person that speaks or writes them.

Just because I put all these words here doesn't mean you read them, act on them, agree with them, or do anything with them at all. You accept your power to leave what I write on the page. You accept your power of choice to control whether or not you take on the strategies I offer. I accept that you that choice.

Somehow, this changes when the words are perceived to be mean or cruel. For whatever reason this scenario seems to change the rules. It's no longer a choice as to whether I take on those words or not, now somehow I have to take on those words because they made me feel pain or because I disagreed with what was said.

Mean words make us defend ourselves, the pain, and the trigger. Mean words make the ego take over. It's like the higher awareness we have when we're not offended or triggered, goes out the window. Suddenly those ideas no longer apply. The truth is, they always apply, whether you're triggered or not. Your ego doesn't like that because your ego's job is to help protect you. It's way of protecting you is by making you defend yourself.

It bears repeating that the ego is not out to get you. The ego isn't bad. It's not

doing anything wrong. It just has some strategies that aren't helpful. Our job in life is to learn how to work with the ego and often that means learning how to manage the ego by giving it some new strategies that work better. This is one of those times where we need to offer the ego a different way of handling things. We have to teach it that it doesn't need to defend us from the pain other people offer. It doesn't need to defend us from our own triggers.

Learning how to do this is an important, life-changing skill that will make your life easier to manage. You'll feel better more of the time. It's not that we're teaching ourselves not to care about other people. What we're teaching ourselves to do is not be triggered so that we don't have to defend anything. It offers us the ability to be compassionate regardless of what other people are spewing at us. Your reaction to other people when they are offering you pain in this way, matters. Your triggered reaction isn't actually all that helpful. You would be surprised what other people do when you change that, when you stop reacting in that triggered way that you have. Let's start by dealing with some of the arguments with it!

Your Point of Control

I've written a bunch of these based on different scenarios that show up in our lives. I could literally copy and paste this section from one booklet to the other. Now, I won't do that, but the message is always the same. Your point of control is within you. It's not out there. It's not in other people. It's in you. When we're talking about boundaries and triggers, our point of control is in how we respond or react to other people's pain.

The way we change anything in our lives is by changing how we respond and react to those things. That's it. That's the fix. That's why self-awareness is so important because when you don't have self-awareness you can't recognize where you're contributing to the problem, intentionally or unintentionally. You need self-awareness to do this because that's how you'll stop contributing to the problems you're trying to fix.

Boundaries and triggers both put your point of control outside of you. You blame the circumstance or the other person for your crappy reaction. Well, guess what? It's not the other person's fault you're being a train wreck. That's on you! Your

circumstances are not responsible for your reactions. You are responsible for your reactions. When you stop telling the stories about how you're a victim of your circumstances, you'll be able to start controlling your own response to those same circumstances. When you do that, that's when your circumstances change.

It's the story of victimization that causes you defend yourself. You make yourself a victim of all kinds of things, both intentionally and unintentionally, through the stories you tell about what's happening. The story you tell about how that other person treats you makes you a victim of their behavior. But that story isn't true. They are offering you pain, nothing else. What you do with that pain is up to you. If you choose to make yourself a victim of it to defend your own pain, that's your choice. It's not going to get you the result you want though. It's going to keep you in the pain longer.

By making the choice to take control of your own reaction, you indirectly offer the other person the option to change as well. They may or may not take you up on that offer. Your only job is to stand firm in your changed response to them. By doing so you take the risk that you may have to choose to be in the relationship or not somewhere in the future. You take the risk that they may walk away from the relationship first.

You are ultimately protecting yourself from the pain, you're just doing it in a way that gives you some control over it. No, you can't control the risk of potentially losing the relationship. You can control how much pain you take on though and that's

what you're learning to do. You're doing it without any self-defense or protection mechanisms at all. You're doing it in a way that's healthy. The boundary is now healthy. You still have the boundary. You just changed how you enforce it. You change how it shows up. Boundaries aren't supposed to be mean or cruel. They aren't supposed to be a reflection of pain. You make them that when you use them as self-defense. That's the part you're dropping.

What you'll see is that it makes a difference in how you feel. It makes a difference in the story you tell about the relationships you have with the people around you. It gives you more power and control because you've given it back to yourself. You're no longer punting it outside of you. The change is dramatic once you make it. The fear of the unknown is the thing that keeps you from doing it. That unknown is just going to be there. You're going to have to get over that fear if you want to learn to implement healthy boundaries instead of painful ones.

The Argument With It

The main argument most people have with not defending themselves is that it allows other people to do this more often. We're just letting people walk all over us. I started addressing this a bit in the last section, but let's continue with this idea because it's an important and valid argument to work through.

When people spout pain through insults or arguments, generally they want a reaction. The goal is to drag you into the pit of mud with them. It may not be a conscious goal, but that's usually the unintended plan behind it. Often this comes with a certain amount of blame. They probably blame you for how they feel. We already know that this argument isn't true. They are responsible for how they feel and you can't fix that. So, the premise of the argument is based on a lie. The goal is not to change that, but to simply understand it.

Now that we see that they are spouting pain based on the lie that you made them feel some kind of a way, we can stop taking on the blame. The blame isn't ours. That's their story. We know it's not true. We don't have to accept it or do anything

about it. We don't have to defend ourselves from this story.

When you first respond with compassion instead of jumping into the argument or defending yourself, it will probably make them more mad than they already are. The reality of this scenario is that you might get dragged in anyway a few times before you're able to stay out of it.

But here's the thing - you will eventually be able to stay out of it. What you're ultimately doing is changing the boundaries and the rules in the relationship. You're making yourself a safe place for that person to come in and try to argue with you or blame you for things that you don't have control over, like how they feel. When they see that they are safe and that you're not willing to pick up what they are offering you when it's offered to you like that, they will either change how they offer the pain or they will stop offering the pain completely.

The healthy boundary gets created when you decide that you're not willing to take it on when they offer it to you in a mean way. The way in which you create that boundary is not through triggered defensiveness, it's through compassion and self-restraint. You essentially indirectly make them choose whether they want the relationship with you or not.

Now you're afraid you might lose the relationship. Think about that for a second. You don't want them to treat you like that because it makes you not want the relationship with them. But then you defend the pain by saying you don't want to change how you react because the risk is that they won't want the relationship with

you. Huh? Do you see the problem in the logic?

The way you stop people from treating you like that is not through triggered defensiveness. It's through compassion. It's by deciding that you're not willing to engage with people who offer you nothing but pain. You're not willing to jump in the mud pit anymore. So, unless they want to get out of there and have a reasonable conversation with you, you're simply not going to play.

Triggered defensiveness makes it worse. It doesn't fix anything. The argument that somehow not being a defensive, triggered, train wreck leaves you open to people hurting you all the time, is a lie. It's not true. The lie is what keeps you defending the pain.

How do I know? Because I did this for myself! I stopped being a triggered, defensive, train wreck. I stopped engaging in the argument. I stopped picking up the pain from other people. I offered compassion. I stood my ground. I changed the rules. Guess what? My relationships changed. You know what else? I didn't lose anybody.

This is not a quick fix because you have to be willing to allow people to catch up to you. It's an indirect use of energy. You're not making anybody do anything. You're just simply standing your ground, being compassionate, and waiting for them to catch on. It might take days. It might take weeks or months. They may never catch on, but remember the relationship is a choice. If it's been a while and they haven't figured it out yet, you're allowed to walk away. You don't have to stay there.

The argument now is that you don't want to lose the relationship. But this argument is a catch-22 because you want them to change so you don't have to make a choice. It doesn't work like that. You can't make people change. Somewhere in the process you may have to make the choice if they don't catch on. The other option is that you accept the relationship as it is. Just get okay with it and stay in it.

There is no wrong choice. You just like to trap yourself in the pain and then wonder why you're upset. The problem is that it's not an easy choice. There is inherent risk in changing how you react to other people. What will they think? What will they do? Will they leave me? But ultimately those are all part of a bigger choice that you're making for yourself. How do you want to be treated?

The way you work on changing the relationships in your life that are problematic to you is by changing how you react to those relationships. This is true, not just with people, but also with the circumstances and the problems that you have in your life. When you change how you react you change your life. One of the first places that we can change our behavior and have a massive impact is through beginning to drop the boundaries we have that are protecting our pain.

You're not opening yourself up to more pain by dropping those shields you have. You're freeing yourself to create relationships in your life that make the shields unnecessary. You do that by changing the relationships where you still feel like the shields are necessary. It's practice. You're learning how to be in the world without needing shields. The way you do that is by dropping them in the places where you still

think you need them. Trial by fire. Or at least that's what it feels like. But it's not. The place to learn is where the pain is. You don't learn by avoiding pain. You learn by dealing with the pain directly. Not easy is it? But it's worth it. How do I know? Because I did this myself. You can too. Just try it and see what happens.

Shift Your Perspective

We've actually already done this because we took away the story that makes you a victim and causes you to blame others for how you feel. That's the perspective that creates all the triggers and boundaries you think you need. You're using them to control the pain that people offer you. It doesn't ever work though because if you're triggered anyway, then it's not actually solving anything. You just think it is. Maybe you even use it as validation for removing that person from your life. I would question why you need pain as validation for making a choice to begin with.

Every relationship is optional. You don't have to be in a relationship with anybody no matter who they are. Why do you need pain to validate your choices? Why do you need a trigger as a reason to make the choice you probably wanted to make anyway?

The only thing pain validates is that you're still in pain. That's it. You just haven't done the work yet. It doesn't validate your choices. It just makes you make

choices from pain. It makes you make choices you don't like or that you're unhappy with. It makes you create more pain. It doesn't validate anything. It does make a good excuse though, doesn't it?

My perspective on pain is that it's showing you what you need to work on within yourself. It doesn't matter what the pain is, how it got there, or why it's there. It doesn't matter what the circumstance was or who said what to who. Pain is there to simply show you what you need to heal within yourself. That's it.

When you see pain as a point of self-reflection instead of a reason to make up a good story, it gives you a practical way to manage the pain. It gives you a practical method of healing so that you're not making choices from the pain, you're not creating more pain, and you're not offering the pain to other people.

Why is this pain here and how do I deal with it? That's it. That's all you ever have to do. You don't have to swim in it. You don't have to re-live it. You don't have to wear it or carry it around with you for the rest of your life. You simply have to understand why it's there, what it triggered within you, and what you need to do to heal or change that. There are two critical things for you to manage: You manage your behavior externally through your response or reaction and you manage what you do with the experience within yourself internally. Those two things are the things that you're in control of and that's what gives you the power to create your life on your own terms without ever needing to defend anything to anyone. That's where your power is all the time.

Self-mastery is how you do that! Self-mastery is your key to understanding yourself within the experience. It offers you self-awareness to recognize what you're thinking and how you feel about what's happening. It allows you to manage those things so you don't tell stories and it doesn't become chaos. Then it allows you to shift your behavior because now that you're managing your thoughts and feelings, you can consciously respond and react to what's happening around you.

Boundaries and triggers are unconscious reactions to other people. There is no self-awareness there. There is pain but you're not acknowledging that yet. You're still busy defending yourself from the pain of the other person. You're making the problem worse. They were probably already triggered and then you triggered them again through your own pain. Your reaction matters here but it's hard to see because you're focused on trying to change the other person's behavior. But you don't have control over that. So instead you just try to protect yourself and then get mad when it doesn't work.

Your perspective matters. How you see it matters. When you can learn to leave the experience alone and instead focus solely on the pain that was created within you and what you do with that, it stops you from creating more pain. It stops you from identifying with the pain, taking it on, carrying it with you forever, reacting badly because of it, or making the problem worse. Pain creates pain this way. The way you manage that is by shifting your perspective on what people are doing and why they are doing it.

People are almost always reflecting pain when they are acting badly. If you can see that and stop making yourself a victim of it, then you can change it. But not until you're willing to shift your perspective will that happen.

The need to defend yourself is a choice. It's a choice based on pain. You can make a new choice anytime you're ready. I promise that when you do, it will change your life for the better.